LA BOMBA: MUSIC, RACE AND GLOBALIZATION IN ECUADOR'S CHOTA-MIRA VALLEY

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Introduction

As a means of contextualizing the present discussion of *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity, this article addresses the dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador that circumscribe the revival, current practice, and transformation of *La Bomba*. Such a discussion acknowledges the need to examine black cultural identity and cultural traditions within a national as well as a diasporic framework. It also reflects the understanding that cultural traditions not only represent cultural identity but speak to the particulars of time and place informing their use and meaning. In other words, *La Bomba*, as an expression of a distinct highland black cultural identity, responds to the lived realities and immediate necessities of the *afrochoteño* communities. To speak of *La Bomba* in this regard is to speak of race, racism, national identity, and the *afrochoteño* struggle for social and political equality in Ecuador.

To this end, the following discussion, which is divided into three sections, examines how local and national representations of *afrochoteño* identity engage the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *interculturalidad* currently shaping discourse on race and national identity in Ecuador. The first two sections of this article explore the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *interculturalidad*, as well as their implications for race and race relations in Latin America and Ecuador. The third section addresses the significance of these two ideologies in the specific formation and representation of *afrochoteño* identity. I conclude with a brief anecdote that considers how this particular case study potentially problematizes our understanding of black cultural identity, tradition, and the question of cultural change.

Afro-Ecuador: The Nation's Invisible "Other"

During the summer of 2006, while a resident director for The Ohio State University's study abroad program in Quito, I witnessed a most telling phenomenon with regards to the dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador. Ecuadorians throughout the nation took to the streets and celebrated as the national soccer team advanced, with a series of impressive wins, to its second round match with England in the FIFA World Cup. The team's unprecedented performance made international headlines that summer, bringing unexpected attention to yet another aspect of the team: its racial makeup. The majority of the team's players, including its starting lineup, were black.

While constituting only eight percent of Ecuador's population, Afro-Ecuadorians took center stage during the World Cup, representing the Andean nation on an international scale. With the image of the nation inverted and reflected back, many Ecuadorians began to question long held assumptions about national identity and reflect on issues of race and racism. hat the nation would be mistaken for an "African" one, meaning black, was a concern voiced on more than one occasion. "So long as they win," was the common response. I found this exchange to be highly indicative of the racist attitudes generally left unspoken among many Ecuadorians. Such perceptions did not stop the Ecuadorian nation from rallying around their team and celebrating its stars as national heroes, however. Yet it seems that blacks are only valued and taken seriously far their ability to handle a soccer ball and place it into a net. When it comes to more serious matters, they remain invisible.

The marginalized status and place of blacks in Ecuador until recently ensured their absence in representations of the nation's history, development, and constituency. Though now present in both rural and urban areas throughout the nation, Ecuador's black population is historically descended from two separate black settlements: one situated along the Pacific littoral of the northwest province of Esmeraldas, and one along the rivers Chota and Mira traversing the northern provinces of Imbabura and Carchi. These two regions and their respective populations are distinct in terms of their origins, historical development, cultural beliefs, traditions, and ways of life. While Esmeraldas was founded by marooned slaves shipwrecked off of the Pacific coast in the sixteenth century, the Chota-Mira valley was populated by enslaved Africans brought by Jesuits during the seventeenth century to supplant indigenous labor in the local sugar cane and coca industry. The relative isolation of the black Pacific communities and the particular experience of slavery among those of the highlands circumscribed and informed the development of their respective cultures. As a result, the local traditions of each region reflect these historical differences in their type, form, aesthetics, practice, and meaning. Despite the divergent historical trajectories of these communities, both *afroesmeraldeños* and *afrochoteño*s share a common challenge in overcoming racism, seeking social equality, and in affirming, documenting, and maintaining their cultural heritage and identity. This struggle, in turn, has significantly impacted local traditions such as *La Bomba*.

The highland song and dance genre known as *La Bomba* is today perhaps the most prominent signifier of *afrochoteño* identity. Originating sometime during the colonial period among the region's enslaved black population; *La Bomba* connotes a particular drum, rhythm, song form, dance, and performance event most likely of West African origin. Its development, however, reflects years of cross-cultural interaction with neighboring indigenous communities and the predominant *mestizo* population. While celebrated today among *afrochoteños* for its cultural ties to Africa, *La Bomba* was once nearly forgotten as *afrochoteño* youth, emigrating to Ecuador's urban centers in search of opportunity from the 1960s through the 1980s, turned to more upbeat and modern rhythms such as *salsa*, *cumbia*, and *merengue* hailing from Colombia, the Caribbean, and the United States. *La Bomba* and its knowledge remained in the collective memory of Chota's elders and in the hands of a specialized few until renewed interest sparked its revival in the late 1990s. Today, *La Bomba* thrives as numerous *afrochoteño* folkloric, commercial, and local musicians and dancers interpret this regional genre throughout Ecuador.

As alluded to above, both *La Bomba*'s revival at the turn of the twenty-first century and its sudden emergence as a symbol of *afrochoteño* identity may be understood in relation to the particular dynamics of race and race relations informing perceptions and representations of blackness in Ecuador. As elsewhere in Latin America, the concept of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) predominated in Ecuador during the greater part of the twentieth century as an ideology of national identity. This led to a stratified social hierarchy wherein citizenship and the potential for social and economic progress were determined by race. Upward social mobility for many Afro-Ecuadorians in this context involved strategies of whitening (*blanqueamiento*), either through interracial marriage or cultural distanciation. Since the 1990s, however, the inherently racist ideology of *mestizaje* has been challenged by the more pluralistic and egalitarian notion of national identity known as

interculturalidad, first introduced and promoted by grassroots indigenous organizations within Ecuador. The following sections address how these opposing ideologies have informed perceptions and representations of Afro-Ecuadorian and *afrochoteño* identity.

Mestizaje and Race Relations in Latin America and Ecuador

The issue of race and racism in Ecuador, as in most of Latin America, is a complex and contentious one, involving nationalist ideologies of modernization and notions of social and economic progress inherently discriminatory in their conception and language. *Mestizaje*, or the concept of race mixture, most aptly conveys these still prevalent, though changing attitudes concerning ethnic relations and national identity operating in many Latin American countries. While the term originally emerged as a celebration of the unique cultural makeup of Latin America's republics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, post World War II *mestizaje* connotes the homogenization of cultural difference and the gradual erasure of ethnic identity in the name of progress. Put simply, to be black or indigenous in such a social model is to be backward, uneducated, and therefore antithetical to the goals and aspirations of modernization. As a result, the black and indigenous populations are marginalized if not entirely excluded from discussions concerning the nation, its direction, and their place therein[1].

Citizenship in such a context means the negation of racial/ethnic identity and its defining cultural markers. This is done through biological mixture and/or through the appropriation of dominant social norms and behaviors. Thus blacks and *indígenas* can potentially better their social and economic position, or "*mejorar la raza*," through strategic mixing and by approximating white-*mestizo* culture. Many scholars have since dubbed this social strategy *blanqueamiento*, or whitening, and have noted that the subsequent association of whiteness with modernization has led to an internalized form of racism that conflates race with class. Thus, racial tensions and racism in Latin America tends to be understood in terms of class rather than of race. Latin America's claim to racial democracy, denial of racism and backlash against ethnic mobilizations stems from this particular form of discrimination[2].

This is not to say, however, that the indigenous and black populations passively submit to the ideology of *mestizaje*. On the contrary, there are numerous documented and celebrated instances of social and political resistance and activism throughout Latin America[3].That these movements are mobilized around particular ethnic identities suggests a response, in part, to the homogenizing aspect of *mestizaje* as well as a positive awareness of ethnic/racial identity. Yet while individuals may identify with one particular collective (e.g., *indígena* or *negro*/*afro*), they may choose to self identify in other ways at other times. In this way, they may ultimately participate in or pursue the project of *mestizaje*[4].

Far from producing a homogenizing and hegemonic social structure, then, *mestizaje* presents a complex system in which sameness and difference coexist. The dynamics of this relationship are

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[1] See Appelbaum et al., Wade (*Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*), and Whitten and Torres for an overview of *mestizaje* in Latin America.

[2] See Appelbaum et al (8), Fiola, Viotti da Costa, Wade (*Race and Ethnicity* 45-57; *Blackness and Race Mixture*), Whitten and Torres (1-33).

[3] For a discussion of contemporary indigenous movements in Latin America, see Escobar and Alvarez, Langer and Muñoz, Postero and Zamosc, and Yashar; on Ecuador and indigenous politics specifically see Clark and Becker, Martin, Selverston-Scher, and Whitten (*Millenial Ecuador*); see also Chalá-Cruz, Lara and Tenorio, Medina and Castro, and Sovoia and Ocles on Afro-Ecuadorian uprisings and movements.

[4] See Wade (*Blackness and Race Mixture in Colombia*), Rahier ("Racist Stereotypes and the Embodiment of Blackness"), and Whitten and Torres for a thorough exploration and discussion of *blanqueamiento* as a social strategy for upward mobility.

thoroughly explored by Peter Wade in the context of Colombia. He suggests we understand *mestizaje* in terms of a dialogue between homogeneity and heterogeneity, noting that the idealized *mestizo* exists only in relation to an "other" through which it is conceptualized and constructed (Wade 1993: 19). In other words, difference, or "otherness" in this context, can be understood as a necessary condition of *mestizaje*. As Wade concludes, it is in the exploitation of the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity inherent in *mestizaje* that individual agency exists (Wade 1993: 11).

Mestizaje and Blackness in Ecuador

Within Ecuador in particular, the dynamics of race and race relations until the late 1990s were likewise conceptualized in terms of the social and economic aspirations of *mestizaje*. As elsewhere in Latin America, the strengthening of Ecuador's economy and its growing participation in the global market as a producer and exporter of bananas during the 1940s and oil in the 1970s exacerbated a political concern with modernizing the nation. The scope of this project extended beyond the nation's economy and infrastructure to encompass questions of culture and national image. The language and emphasis of this discourse and its projects made explicit its objective: the assimilation of the nation's "uncultured" indigenous population (Clark 1993: 193; Stutzman 1981: 45-46). That *indígenas* were considered uncouth, unclean, backwards, and uneducated is still evident in contemporary stereotypes. To this day common popular insults include *indio sucio*, or simply *indio* (a pejorative term for an indigenous person) and the use of patronizing diminutives continues among many *mestizos* directly addressing *indígenas*. Just as in other parts of Latin America, this particular notion of modernization meant that the citizenship and meaningful participation of Ecuador's indigenous population depended on their successful transformation and subsequent integration into the dominant *mestizo* culture. This particular social model prevailed through the late1990s, officially making Ecuador a *mestizo*, Andean nation.

Yet while the ideal Ecuadorian *mestizo* was conceived in opposition to the highly stylized, patronizing, and racist image of the *indio*, the nation's black population was excluded altogether. This leads to the popular notion among many academics that Afro-Ecuadorians are *invisivilizados* or made invisible within academic, political, and popular discourse and analysis. Indeed, the absence of Afro-Ecuadorians in representations of the nation's history, development, and constitution is by now well documented[5]. Perhaps most telling in this regard is John Antón's survey of Afro-Ecuadorian representation in the museums of the *Banco Central del Ecuador* (Central Bank of Ecuador). He found that while museum branches located on the outskirts of Quito and outlying provinces displayed minimal representation of Afro-Ecuadorian identity and culture, the largest exhibit being in Esmeraldas, the main museum housed in the *Casa de La Cultura* contained none (Anton 2007: 124-125). As Antón and others acknowledge (Anton 2007: 127), this absence of representation in national spaces is in part due to the lack of scholarship on Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, academic scholarship in Ecuador prior to the 1990s often overlooked Afro-Ecuadorian communities in favor of topics relating to indigenous or *mestizo* culture, history, and social and political issues. This fact and the exclusion of Afro-Ecuadorian communities in national representations of Ecuadorian history and culture reinforce and

[5] The absence of Afro-Ecuadorian representation in national museums, commercial news media, educational texts, and academic scholarship has been examined and criticized by Antón, De Saá, FECONIC (*Nuestra Historia*), and Walsh ("*Interculturalidad and Colonialidad del Poder*") among others.

propagate the ideology and project of *mestizaje*, ultimately maintaining the marginal status and place of Afro-Ecuadorians as non-citizens (Anton 2007: 125-127)[6].

For Jean Rahier ("Blackness, the Racial/Spatial Order, Migrations, and Miss Ecuador"), the particular dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador and the extreme marginalization of Afro-Ecuadorians is additionally constituted and further reified by the relative isolation and remoteness of the historic Afro-Ecuadorian settlements of Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira valley from the nation's political and economic centers of power (Quito and Guayaquil in particular). Race, place, and power inform one another in what Rahier calls the "moral topography," or the "racial/spatial order" of a particular nation. Indeed, while Afro-Ecuadorians are now present in urban centers throughout the nation, to this day blackness in Ecuador is intimately associated with Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira valley, places remote, foreign, and "other" to urban white-*mestizos*. In Ecuador, then, Afro-Ecuadorians may be understood as the ultimate "other," a subaltern identity within a subaltern space.

Yet, as Adolfo Albán (Albán 2006: 60) points out, it is not so much the lack of visibility suffered by Afro-Ecuadorians as the lack of positive and constructive representation that is most disconcerting. As the 2006 World Cup scenario indicates, Afro-Ecuadorians are indeed visible insofar as they conform to dominant stereotypes. This negative visibility, argues Achinte, silences Afro-Ecuadorians, essentially invalidating their identity and cultural knowledge. In this way, blackness is objectified to such an extent that it places Afro-Ecuadorians outside the boundaries and scope of *mestizaje*. Rahier ("Racist Stereotypes and the Embodiment of Blackness", and "Mami, ¿qué será lo que quiere el negro?") in particular documents the extent to which such misrepresentations reify racist and sexualized stereotypes concerning blackness as well as how they inform both Afro-Ecuadorian and non-black sensibilities about race. In the popular imagination, black men and women are portrayed as highly sexualized, aggressive, and violent beings, to be desired as sexual objects while simultaneously repulsed for their base moral character by the more civilized, conservative, and demure *mestizo*. Likewise, blacks are seen as naturally athletic and hard working, while at the same time inept and lazy. As Rahier notes, many Afro-Ecuadorians, especially those living in the nation's urban centers, negotiate their identity in part through the appropriation or rejection of these racist stereotypes. Thus, a disproportionate number of Afro-Ecuadorians make their living in what may otherwise be considered stereotypical jobs and roles for blacks, such as policemen, military personnel, security guards, soccer players and other athletes, domestic servants, and prostitutes. More recently, the social and economic challenges facing increasing black urban populations, sensational news media representation, and the increasing influence of a hip-hop and gangsta-rap culture additionally introduce the stereotypes of blacks as thieves, rapists, and drug dealers/users.

As a result of this negative visibility and the abounding stereotypes, Afro-Ecuadorians encounter blatant and conspicuous forms of racism on a daily basis. Many of these experiences emerged in my formal and informal discussions with *afrochoteños*. While often reluctant to discuss their experiences in terms of racism, they reveal various instances of differential treatment and disrespect. One particular individual shared that while taking a seat on a bus, the woman next to him got up and moved. Many others note that they have been treated poorly or spoken to in a condescending and patronizing manner while conducting official business. The use of the word "*negro*" by non-blacks in particular bothered many *afrochoteños* with whom I spoke. One woman

[6] Quijano, Mignolo, Walsh, and other scholars understand this extreme marginalization as the lasting legacy of colonialism and slavery in Latin America. Their consideration of modernity in relation to colonialism in particular illuminates the historically constituted asymmetrical power dynamics informing social relations and black ethnic identity in Ecuador today. It is this dimension of modernity, which Quijano refers to as the "coloniality of power," that leads Mignolo and Walsh to consider the epistemological value of subaltern ways of knowing that emerge from the differential experience of colonialism, or what Mignolo understands as the "colonial difference."

defiantly stated that she does not allow anyone to refer to her as "*negra*," preferring the term "*morena*" instead. As an insult, "*negro*" is especially heard during soccer games as either opposing or disgruntled fans shout overtly racist comments at Afro-Ecuadorian players on the field. In a now infamous incident in Ecuadorian league soccer, *Barcelona de Guayaquil* was fined $2,000 by the FEF (Ecuadorian Federation of Soccer) for racist comments and expressions its fans made toward opposing players during the 2008 championship game against *Deportivo Quito*. A revealing documentary on the topic of racism in the Ecuadorian soccer world was produced shortly thereafter. More innocuous, though no less disrespectful, is the tendency on the part of many *mestizos* to essentialize blackness and to patronize Afro-Ecuadorians through the vocalization of stereotypes and the use of diminutives. Yet, as noted earlier, the tendency to discuss race in terms of class and the negation of black ethnic identity in the consciousness of many Ecuadorians makes blackness and racism particularly difficult to locate.

A 2004 study, however, shows that Ecuadorians are now beginning to recognize and confront the issue of racism. Put together by the *Sistema de IndicadoresSociales del Pueblo Afroecuatoriano* (SISPAE), *Racismo y Discriminación Racial en Ecuador* assesses the perception of racism among rural and urban Ecuadorian citizens (both black and non-black) through a series of direct questions concerning acts and locations of racism, perpetrators and victims of racism, the relationship between race, racism, and poverty, anti-racist legislation, and governmental responsibility. While the survey shows that an awareness of these issues is highest among Afro-Ecuadorians themselves, it nonetheless indicates that urban white-*mestizos* in particular are also taking notice (Antón 2005: 57-63)[7]. National support for the *tri-color* (Ecuador's national soccer team) during the 2006 World Cup, the recent FEF ruling on the *Barcelona club de Guayaquil* and *Deportivo Quito* incident, and the ensuing public debates over race and racism in Ecuador support these findings. These trends indicate that *mestizaje* and its implicit assumption of white-*mestizo* superiority are currently being questioned.

Seeing Blackness: *Interculturalidad* and *Etnoeducación*

The current dynamics of race relations in Ecuador may be changing as the indigenous and black social and political movement, begun in the 1980s and 1990s, continues to grow in political strength, demanding the transformation of the political and social structure of the nation so as to recognize, validate, and give voice to the nation's diverse constituency. The increased presence of *indígenas* and Afro-Ecuadorians in governmental positions, the formation of the national indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian organizations CONAIE and CODAE, the proliferation of local social and political organizations, and the 1998 and 2008 constitutional revisions further recognizing the citizenship, rights, and relative autonomy of Ecuador's indigenous and black communities are a testament to the success of this movement over the past twenty years alone. Giving shape to and guiding this movement and its transformational projects is an ideology known as *interculturalidad* (interculturality)[8].

A central tenet of the Confederation of the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), *interculturalidad* emerged during the 1990s as an ideology, organizing principle, and method for

[7] It is interesting to note that this perception decreases outside of the urban context and is especially low among Ecuador's rural indigenous population: those most likely to have little to no contact with Ecuador's black population.
[8] While *interculturalidad* may be understood in a broader Andean and even global context, its articulation and social/political manifestation takes on a unique character in Ecuador as a grassroots phenomenon responding to the particular socio-historical and socio-political conditions of the nation's indigenous communities. For a discussion of *interculturalidad* in Ecuador specifically, see Walsh; see also Puente. For an overview of its development in postcolonial theory, see Rodriguez.

social, economic, and political transformation. As opposed to *mestizaje*, it takes difference as the fundamental unifying aspect of the nation and the means by which just and equitable social and economic progress may be attained. The social and political goal of *interculturalidad* is the creation of a plurinational state that recognizes, respects, represents, and reflects the particular values, concerns, beliefs, social, economic, and political models, and ways of life of the nation's diverse constituent population. More importantly, all these things are also discursively engaged as among equals. This ideology and model differs from that of multiculturalism which, while tolerating diversity, subsumes difference within a Eurocentric hierarchical framework that consequently delegitimizes ways of knowing and being voiced from beyond the periphery or margins of Western thought. Thus *interculturalidad* necessarily implies the transformation of existing structures of power, and presents a subaltern, counter-hegemonic and de-colonizing ideology, discourse, and practice (Walsh 2007: 2-15)[9].

Despite these advantages, *interculturalidad* is nonetheless formed in relation to the dominant ideology of *mestizaje*, such that the very subaltern space from which *interculturalidad*is enunciated is made possible by, or is a condition of, colonialism and *mestizaje*. The relative strength of Ecuador's indigenous movements as well as the ability to organize around ethnic identity, therefore, is predicated in part upon a conception of ethnic identity made possible by *mestizaje*. This is significant in that *interculturalidad*, in its conception, is not itself entirely immune from the discourse of power to which it responds. While arising from the socio-historical experience of colonialism and its legacy, *interculturalidad* nonetheless reifies the "otherness" of Afro-Ecuadorians in its emphasis on indigenous-*mestizo* relations and the indigenous struggle (Walsh 2007: 6, 7). Indeed, Afro-Ecuadorian organizations are reluctant to take up the banner of *interculturalidad*as it is largely associated with the indigenous struggle, choosing instead to consolidate and fortify their own identity through a process and project known as *etnoeducación*. Yet as Walsh makes clear, *etnoeducación* and *interculturalidad* represent two instances of the same process in that the former is a necessary precondition for successfully engaging in the outward inter-cultural dialogue of the latter (Walsh 2007: 9-10).

Though Afro-Ecuadorians yet remain marginalized and excluded as the ultimate "other," the recent challenges to the dominant, discriminatory ideology of *mestizaje* and the social and political inroads made by Ecuador's indigenous and black organizations underscore the degree to which Ecuadorians are reflecting on such issues. Ecuadorians, it seems, are now beginning to *see* race, and if not yet recognize racism, then they are at least confronting the question of blackness and its relation to national identity. As such, the *indígena* and *afro* social movement and the ideology of *interculturalidad* may yet potentially transform notions of national identity, race/ethnicity, and racial dynamics in Ecuador.

The Chota-Mira valley, Blackness, and *Afrochoteño* Identity

When I first decided to visit the Chota-Mira valley, several *mestizo-Quiteño* friends attempted to dissuade me for fear that I might be raped or even killed. Discussion of my research project with other *mestizos* in Quito and Ibarra likewise prompted curiosity and alarm. "Chota?" they would ask quizzically, then commenting "*arto negros* (full of blacks)" as if to say "why would anyone possibly want to go there." Others attempted to convince me *La Bomba* was not a worthwhile project, steering me either toward what they considered more "authentic" black cultural traditions or

[9] Multiculturalism is by now thoroughly critiqued by many academics such as Sizek, that take it to be yet another colonizing, hegemonic ideology imposed by the West. For a further discussion of its relationship to *interculturalidad*, see the following: Puente; Rodriguez; and Zambrano. Also see Puente for a consideration of state co-option in the use of *interculturalidad*.

other aspects of Ecuadorian culture entirely. It was clear from these experiences that the Chota-Mira valley was feared and misunderstood by many *mestizos* as an "other" space and entity within Ecuador, its people and cultural traditions relegated to the past and entirely excluded from conceptions of the modern nation. Thus, the Chota-Mira valley conforms to Ecuador's racial/spatial order noted above. Among the few positive associations voiced in my discussions with urban *mestizos* was soccer.

Despite this marginalization, *afrochoteños* since the 1960s have begun to question their own regional and ethnic identity. As Paloma Fernandez-Rasines notes, this awareness grows out of the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for land tenure during the 1960s and 1970s (Fernandez-Rasines 2001: 81). The agrarian reform acts of this time effectively ended the *huasipungo* era, redistributing land ownership among its workers and inhabitants. Though slavery was effectively abolished in 1851, these acts mark the end of a long history of black subjugation, dependence, and servitude in the region. For many *afrochoteños*, the right to land ownership hails the true end of slavery. It is no wonder, then, that a strong sense of regional identity rooted in place emerges during this time.

The few early studies dealing with the Chota-Mira valley underscore this regional association. Though not concerned with questions of identity, be it ethnic or regional, Lourdes Rodríguez Jaramillo and Rosario Coronel Feijóo nonetheless establish an intimate connection between the inhabitants of the Chota-Mira valley and the land itself in their emphasis on agriculture and land ownership. For them, the unique character of the region, including its current demographic and culture stems from the transformation of its agricultural activity (from coca and cotton to sugar-cane) and the gradual development of a plantation system (Rodríguez Jamarillo 1994: 123; Feijóo 1991: 125-131). Jaramillo in particular roots the distinct culture of the local black population to their African heritage and experience of *hacienda* life (Rodríguez Jamarillo 1994: 123). The latter is significant for Jaramillo in that even today, the land "constitutes the principle and perhaps only source of work" for many of the region's youth. Implicit in both studies is the notion that the identity of the local population is rooted in sense of place implicating both slavery and the *afrochoteño* struggle for social equality in its construction. When considering the history of slavery and the current social dynamics in Ecuador, it is little wonder that issues such as land ownership and local agriculture play a significant role in perceptions of identity in the Chota-Mira valley.

This connection to the land is also evident in scholarship dealing with *afrochoteño* cultural traditions prior to the mid-1990s. Segundo Obando and John Schechter, for example, likewise understand local identity in terms of regionalism rather than of ethnicity *per se*. Citing the confluence of indigenous, European, and African elements in *La Bomba* specifically, Obando (Obando 1985: 40) sees the culture of the region as an "indo-hispanic-indigenous" hybrid. Schechter goes so far as to suggest that ethnicity as a concept may not be applicable to the black population of the Chota-Mira valley in that they themselves do not conceive of their identity in such terms (Schechter 1993: 298). Instead, Schechter (Schechter 1993: 299-300) notes a transcultural, regional identity reflected in the music and culture of the Chota-Mira valley that supersedes ethnic or racial identity and connects it with a general Ecuadorian "highland ethnicity." In emphasizing regionalism over ethnicity, Obando and Schechter (as well as Rodríguez and Feijóo) reflect the degree to which *mestizaje*, as a dominant ideology of national identity, impacts perceptions of identity.

The effort to define this identity in ethnic terms, however, has increased, taking on a greater sense of urgency since the indigenous and afro movements of the 1990s and in light of the emerging counter-hegemonic discourses, ideologies, and processes of *interculturalidad* and *etnoeducación*. Indeed, much of the current literature on the Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira valley emphasizes Africa as the source of contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian culture and identity. Federica Peters and native Chota anthropologist José Chalá Cruz in particular establish continuity between contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian and West Africa culture and cultural traditions, situating their respective studies in relation to West African cultural forms and aesthetics.

Peters, for instance, interprets the significance of *afrochoteñosalves* (liturgical songs sung during Holy Week, on the Day of the Dead, and at wakes) in relation to general West African beliefs and aesthetics concerning life, death, and the relationship between the natural and supernatural world, including the ways in which those relationships are mediated. For Peters, the *salves* express an integral aspect of *afrochoteño* identity and spirituality fundamentally rooted in West Africa. Peters believes that it is this continuity that endows the *salves* with their social and spiritual significance and allows for their efficacy in mediating *afrochoteño* experiences "between life and death," or joy and suffering, as a form of "communal healing" or therapy (Wade 1993: 171). Thus while enslaved, *afrochoteños* managed to retain ways of knowing and being fundamentally African in nature that have not only shaped contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian cultural traditions, but have helped them to survive in the face of extreme subjugation and marginalization.

This perspective is reiterated by Chalá-Cruz, who in particular emphasizes the West African cultural origins of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities and the history of black resistance in the Chota-Mira valley as a means of affirming *afrochoteño* identity. Perhaps most striking is his assertion that the community of Chota itself, located along the river Chota, was originally founded as a *palenque*, or a community of runaway slaves (Chalá Cruz 2006: 137)[10]. His emphasis on *cimarronaje* (flight or escape, in reference to runaway slaves) may be understood as a response to the popular association between the Chota-Mira valley and slavery and its potential negative impact for identity formation among *afrochoteños*. As such, *ChotaProfundo* presents a didactic history of the black communities of the Chota-Mira valley that celebrates, rather than negates, the African origins and cultural heritage of the *afrochoteños*. This perspective, as well as the increasing academic literature and use of the terms "Afro-Ecuadorian" and "*afrochoteño*" in place of *negro*, marks a significant shift in both local and national perceptions of identity among the black communities of the Chota-Mira valley.

This positive self-affirmation through knowledge of local history and an emphasis on ethnicity is in keeping with the project of *etnoeducación*. The efforts by scholars and community members such as Cruz to educate fellow *afrochoteño*s about their own history and traditions include workshops and publications such as *Nuestra Historia*, a textbook assembled by FECONIC (the Federation of Black Communities and Organizations of Imbabura and Carchi). Covering Africa, slavery, racism and the struggle for social equality in Ecuador and the greater African diaspora, the text reaffirms *afrochoteño* identity through informative texts, activities, and quizzes. Ethnic identity, grounded in the African cultural origins and heritage of the *afrochoteño* communities, is here explicitly conceived of and emphasized as a response to the homogenizing ideology of *mestizaje* (Feconic 1995: 36-38).

The recent and fierce claims by *afrochoteños* to an ethnic identity grounded in Africa and in the experience of slavery can be seen as an imperative and default form of social and cultural resistance. Long denied a history and identity beyond that of slavery, the *afrochoteños* are rewriting their place in Ecuador. With the image of Africa foregrounded in contemporary *afrochoteño* culture, traditions such as *La Bomba*, with its clear link to similar African musical traditions, are now celebrated rather than shunned and are becoming emblematic of *afrochoteño* identity. Yet this emphasis on Africa and tradition as central and defining aspects of *afrochoteño* identity is further complicated by the fact that it is founded primarily on cultural forms, materials, and aesthetics that are more and more incongruous with the contemporary experience of daily life for many *afrochoteños*.

[10] While to date there is no known existing documentation substantiating this claim, there is indeed evidence of slave resistance and flight in the region. See Savoia and Ocles for instance.

The once remote and enclosed communities of the region are increasingly becoming part not only of the nation-state, but also of the global community. The construction of a railway and later the Pan-American highway allowed the flow of *afrochoteños* to and from the nation's major urban centers. Many *afrochoteños* make daily trips to Quito and Ibarra either for business, education, or entertainment purposes. Likewise, *afrochoteños* in Quito and Ibarra maintain contact with family in the Chota-Mira valley and make occasional trips back to the region, especially during festivals such as *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). The accessibility of the region also brought outsiders, especially international aid agencies, scholars, international volunteers, entrepreneurs, and more recently tourists and *mestizos* eager to experience *Carnaval* (a pre-Lenten celebration)in Chota. The introduction of electricity brought televisions, radios, and now computers and telephones. *afrochoteños* watch soap operas telecast from Colombia and Nicaragua, surf the internet, access information, images, and music around the world, call relatives in Quito and even internationally. As a result of the recent flow of people, ideas, technology, and money, *afrochoteño* ways of life, and consequently their traditions and perception of identity, is changing. Hospitals, prescription drugs, and Western-trained medical doctors take precedent over local medicinal herbs, curing rituals, and healers, which many see as superstitious and old-fashioned. The clay and straw houses once characteristic of the region give way to concrete and iron. Ceramic plates, glass cups, and silverware replace the once spun wooden dishes, drinking vessels, and utensils now considered the work of artisans. Giant plastic tubs are now favored over the large hollowed gourds among women carrying laundry and goods atop their heads. Oral traditions such as songs, dances, and games are giving way to national and international popular music, dances, and sports. *Salsa*, Hip-Hop, *Reggaeton*, Reggae,*Samba*, *Capoeira,Santeria,* and other musical forms are now heard alongside *La Bomba*. Dusty soccer fields worn with use reflect the dreams of many *afrochoteño* youth longing to wear the yellow, red, and blue jersey in international competition. The Chota-Mira valley is now a part of the global community.

A fundamental change in communication is taking place, many argue. Along with it is the potential end, or at least transformation, of a particular knowledge and way of knowing distinct to these communities and central to their sense of being (identity). And while this fact is deplored by some, giving a sense of urgency to the project of *etnoeducación* and its goal of documenting and preserving local culture, it is clear from interviews that many *afrochoteños*, especially youth, maintain a strong sense of regional and ethnic identity despite these changes. In fact, there is arguably a stronger and more acute awareness of local ethnic identity now than prior to the 1970s. It may be argued, then, that *afrochoteño* identity emerges at the turn of the twenty-first century amidst great social, historical, and political change. This realization, however, has significant implications for the very way in which we begin to approach and discuss questions of identity and cultural change.

Culture Revisited: Identities and Traditions in Transformation

In the spirit of *interculturalidad*, the Ecuadorian museum of ethnohistoric artisan-work, *Mindalae*, located in Quito's bustling *Mariscal* district, presents a space for the "exposition, development, and valuation of the traditional artisan work of the indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and *Montubio* population of the nation." Four floors and eight circular halls display the museum's vast collection of clothing, body adornments, ritual tools, weapons, baskets, instruments, masks, and other such material culture in exhibits designed to emphasize their cultural meaning and value. The arrangement of the displays likewise conveys the notion of intercultural contact and exchange. The coastal *marimba* of the *afroesmeraldeños* shares the same space as an indigenous highland *charango* (a guitar-like instrument), and an Amazonian violin-like instrument. Indeed, it is the

express purpose of the museum to create a space for the dynamic encounter and exchange of cultures, drawing inspiration from the pre-hispanic figure *Mindala* whose function is the negotiation of commercial or trade relations between the four cardinal points. Despite the egalitarian vision of *Mindalae*, it likewise fails to represent Afro-Ecuadorian identity adequately in its oversight of the artisan contributions of the highland communities of the Chota-Mira valley. What is most interesting in this case, however, is not the misrepresentation of Afro-Ecuadorians, their invisibilization or negative visibilization by the dominant *mestizo* society, but the reason why.

I had the rare occasion to pose this question to the museum's director, whom I happened to meet by chance as I was exiting the museum. He seemed genuinely surprised by my suggestion that the museum poorly represented Afro-Ecuadorian culture, noting the few items they did have on display: the *marimba* (a wooden-keyed xylophone), *conunos*(a conical drum), *bombo* (large double-headed drum), *guasa* (a shaker), and the costumes, hats, and carved wooden smoking pipes emblematic of the coastal black population. When pressed about the absence of *afrochoteño* cultural materials, such as the *bomba*, he made a point of "correcting" my supposed misunderstanding of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities. According to him, Ecuador's black population does not constitute a culture per se, but a sub-cultural ethnic group, linked by common origin and spread throughout the nation in various communities. Despite the differences between the coastal and highland black communities, the marimba is thus justified as an adequate representation of the Afro-Ecuadorian population as a whole.

Mindalae's representation and the director's conception of Afro-Ecuadorian identity, flawed as they may be, illuminate the very problem encountered in my study of cultural change. As this chapter has shown, the recent emergence of a subaltern consciousness among the Chota-Mira valley's black population, mobilized and represented in terms of black ethnic identity, disputes the claim that *afrochoteños* in and of themselves do not constitute a cultural entity distinct from that of Esmeralda's black population. et, the effort to consolidate and represent this cultural identity nationally in terms of its transregional and transnational diasporic dimensions, as evident in this discussion, threatens to essentialize and reify the "otherness" of Afro-Ecuadorian and *afrochoteño* identity, ignoring the heterogeneous, divergent, and often conflicting experience of blackness in Ecuador today. Given the contradictions inherent in the current discourse on and representation of Afro-Ecuadorian identity, how do we understand the recent transformation of *La Bomba* and its significance for contemporary *afrochoteño* identity?

There is much work to be done, this is just the beginning.

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